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Environment Department Offers Free Radon Test Kits, The Second Leading Cause of Lung Cancer in the U.S.

(Santa Fe, NM) — To help increase attention paid to radon, the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States, the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has designated January 2004 as "Radon Awareness Month." Colder outdoor temperatures during the winter months make radon more of a concern as people spend more time indoors where radon levels are typically higher. During the month of January NMED will be providing free radon test kits for residential use while supplies last.

Radon is a naturally occurring, colorless, odorless, radioactive gas that exists in most soils and is harmlessly dispersed in outdoor environments. If it enters buildings through openings in the foundation, floor or walls and then decays into radioactive radon "daughters" it can cause adverse health effects when inhaled. Poor ventilation and smoke from cigarettes are known to aggravate the problem. Prolonged exposure increases a person's risk of contracting lung cancer.

"Because you can't see or smell radon, many people tend to minimize its health effects and ignore what could be a problem in their homes," said NMED Secretary Ron Curry. "Through 'Radon Awareness Month' and the dissemination of free test kits, I hope that NMED will draw attention to this public health issue and motivate New Mexicans to protect themselves and their families from radon's serious health effects."

A National Academy of Sciences report has confirmed that radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the U.S. and that it is a serious public health problem. The report concluded that radon causes between 15,000 and 22,000 lung cancer deaths each year, or up to 60 deaths per day.

Any home can have a radon problem and the only way to know if a home has a problem is to test it. Testing a home for radon is easy, and homes with high radon levels can be fixed at a cost similar to many routine home repairs. Free radon test kits can be obtained by contacting Michael A Taylor, NMED Indoor Radon Outreach Coordinator at (505) 827-1093 or via e-mail at Michael_Taylor@nmenv.state.nm.us.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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